

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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FM USINT BAGHDAD

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2807

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0173

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IQ

SUBJ: TRIP REPORT - NORTHERN IRAQ

1. US OFFICER MADE THREE-DAY ROAD TRIP THROUGH NORTHERN IRAQ FEBRUARY 6 - 8, TRAVELING VIA BAGHDAD - KIRKUK - ERBIL - SALAHUDDIN - SHAQLAWA - RUWANDUZ - HAJ OMRAN, RETUGEING VIA KIRKUK - SULAIMANIYA - DERBANDIKHAN - JALAWLA - BAQUBA.

2. ALTHOUGH LIFE IN THIS PART OF IRAQ SEEMS FOR THE MOST PART TO BE RETURNING TO NORMAL, SIGNS OF RECENT WAR ARE STILL NUMEROUS IN MOUNTAINOUS REGION BETWEEN SALAHUDDIN AND HAJ OMRAN PARTICULARLY, ONE SEES SUCH REMINDERS AS VACANT VILLAGES, BOMB CRATERS NEAR ROADS, AND DESTROYED BRIDGES. MANY RIVER CROSSINGS ARE NOW HAVE ON SO-CALLED "BAILEY BRIDGES" OWEN ERECTED ADJACENT TO THEIR DESTROYED PREDECESSORS. REPORTING OFFICER REPEATEDLY GLIMPSED ARMY TRUCKS LYING IN BOTTOMS OF GORGES AND STREAM BEDS, EVIDENCE OF HEAVY TOLL WAR INFLICTED ON GOI ARMED FORCES.

3. MOST STRIKING FEATURE, HOWEVER, IS OVERWHELMING PRESENCE OF IRAQI SOLDIERS IN THIS REGION. ALL BRIDGES AND TUNNELS ARE MANNED
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BY TROOPS, AND ROADS LEAD THROUGH SEVEFAL ARMY CAMPS. TRAVELERS PASSING THROUGH THESE AREAS SEE SIGNS WARNING OF PROHIBITION

AGAINST PHOTOGRAPHS. MILITARY HELICOPTERS WERE ALSO SEEN
CRUISING IN REGION OF ERBIL. NUMEROUS CHECKPOINTS, PARTICULARLY
AT ROAD INTERSECTIONS AND AT BRIDGES, ADD TO SLOWNESS OF TRAVEL
IN THIS AREA.

4. SOME GUEST HOUSES IN AREA NOW FUNCTIONING AND NORMAL ECONOMIC
LIFE SLOWLY RETURNING. WHILE GOI NOW CLEARLY IN CONTROL OF
AREA, KURDISH NATIONALIST ASPIRATIONS OBVIOUSLY REMAIN STRONG
AND GOI WILL PROBABLY CONTINUE TO HAVE PROBLEMS WITH KURDISTAN
FOR SOME TIME TO COME.
WILEY

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